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Bioenergy Facility Opens in Knoxville-Oak Ridge Innovation Valley

VONORE, Tenn., Feb. 1 /PRNewswire/ -- One of the world's first cellulosic ethanol demonstration plants has opened near Vonore, Tennessee, and has begun producing ethanol -- marking what Gov. Phil Bredesen calls "an important step forward" in the race to reduce dependency on fossil fuels.

The \$50 million facility is expected to have an output of 250,000 of ethanol annually and serve as a testing ground for new technologies that can be used in larger scale production.

A partnership of DuPont Danisco Cellulosic Ethanol (DDCE) and the University of Tennessee (UT), the 74,000-square-foot plant has already started producing ethanol from corncobs and switchgrass.

Organized under the management of [Genera Energy](#) LLC, an arm of the university, the facility is a central part of the University of Tennessee's Biofuels Initiative championed by Bredesen. The goals of the initiative are to support bioenergy crop research, establish a production network and position Tennessee as a national leader in clean energy. Bredesen, UT officials and economic development leaders throughout the Knoxville-Oak Ridge Innovation Valley also hope the use of switchgrass will give Tennessee farmers a new cash crop. Switchgrass, a perennial, can grow in marginally productive soil and does not compete with food crops for arable land.

Startup of the plant is also good news for researchers at nearby Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the Department of Energy's largest research center, which finds itself at the forefront of applied carbon fiber research. Many observers are intrigued by the possible uses lignin, a natural byproduct of the biofuels plant, as a relatively inexpensive feedstock that might lower the cost of producing carbon fiber.

The Innovation Valley partners -- [Blount County Chamber of Commerce](#), [Knoxville Chamber](#), [Loudon County Economic Development Agency](#), [Oak Ridge Economic Partnership](#), [The Roane Alliance](#) and the [Tellico Reservoir Development Agency](#) -- work together to leverage technological advances into prosperity.

For more information, visit www.knoxvilleoakridge.com or contact Garrett Wagley at 865/ 246-2661 or at gwagley@knoxvillechamber.com.

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